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DISCOURSE
AGAINST
SELF-MURDER.

PREACHED AT

SOUTH-AUDLEY-CHAPEL,

JANUARY the 12th, 1755.

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L O N D O N :

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JOB Chap. xiv. ver. 14.

All the Days of my appointed Time will I wait, till my Change shall come.

THE Book of *Job* (whether it be a real History, or whether it be only a sacred, Dramatic Performance) exhibits to us the noblest Example of Patience, Resignation, and Submission to the Will of God.

It represents to us a Man, subjected to all the Miseries and Calamities to which human Nature is liable; reduced at once, by the Permission of God, and the Malice of Satan, from the highest State of Grandeur, Affluence, and Prosperity, to the lowest Degree of Misery, Poverty, and Pain.

THE Suddenness of the Stroke adds to the Severity of it. Messenger arrives, with all possible Speed, after Messenger, to acquaint him, that he was spoiled of all his Substance, in all the various Articles in which the Riches of the Eastern Princes consisted; and, what was still more grievous, that by one Blast of a Whirlwind, his Children were all of them destroyed, in the Midst of their Mirth and Festivity.

NOTHING now remained to him but Life, and that was made most grievous, and in a manner intolerable, by a painful

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ful and noisome Disease, which was inflicted on him, from the Crown of his Head, to the Soles of his Feet.

IN the Midst of his sore Afflictions, his Friends came to him, rather to upbraid and reproach, than to comfort and support him—and lastly, his Wife, (like one of the foolish Women) full of Impatience and Despair, advises, and instigates him, to destroy himself—to die—and put an End to that Being, which was now but a Burthen to him.

I SHALL not now lay before you the various Answers that *Job* makes to his Friends, nor his many humble Expressions of Submission to the Will of God; I shall, at present, only take Notice of the pious Resolution, which seems to be plainly contained in the Words of my Text; that, great and grievous as his Afflictions were, he would not shorten them, by any Act of Violence on himself; that, though weary of Life, and wishing for Death, with humble Patience he *would wait all the Days of his appointed Time, until his happy Change should come.*

FROM these Words, which plainly lead to the Subject, and from the Example of this most holy Man, I shall take an Occasion to represent to you the Guilt, and Heinousness of Self-Murder; a Crime, so often, and so daringly committed among us, as to have made it a Proverb of Reproach to this Nation. And I do this the rather, as there have not been wanting Men amongst us, to support and justify this Crime. As what is there, which some Men, in this Age and Nation, have not attempted to justify?

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ON this Occasion, I shall chuse to make use of Christian Arguments; for, from the Gospel, I think, may most evidently appear, the Guilt and Heinousness of this most outrageous Practice. Other Arguments, I know, have been used against it; but I shall not insist on them, where they do not appear to be strictly true and conclusive; for the multiplying Arguments on any Occasion will always have this bad Effect, that when the Weakness of any one Argument is plain and apparent, it will prejudice Men, and make them blind to the Strength and Clearness of all the rest.

As to the Law of Nature, or that Principle of Self-Preservation and Dread of Death, which is so strongly implanted in us, it seems vain to urge it to those, in whom this Principle is entirely extinguished; who, as *Job** expresseth it, *long for Death, and dig for it as for hid Treasure.*

BUT as this Spirit has been highly extolled and spoken of by some late Authors, as productive of great and heroic Actions; I would just observe, that if the Fear of Death could be totally abolished in the greater Part of Mankind, it would make them much worse than they at present are.

THE Vigour of all human Laws must be destroyed, when the extremest Punishment they could inflict, should be looked upon as nothing, and not worth regarding.

LET it be remembered, that the Moment a Man has thrown off all Regard to his *own* Life, he is Master of the Life of whomsoever he has a Mind to destroy. In a Word, how daring and ungovernable would the Wickedness of Man-kind

* Job iii. 21.

kind be, if the Fear even of temporal Death was removed from them?

THE Author of our Nature, who implanted this Principle in it, gave it us for wise and good Purposes; and the extirpating it, if it could be done, would be of the utmost ill Consequence to human Affairs.

I PASS by all that has been said by the Philosophers and wise Men among the Heathens, in relation to Self-Murder: their Opinions on this Point have been various, and contradictory to each other, and even to themselves; and, indeed, the Opinions of the Heathens, even when they coincide with Christianity, are hardly worth producing. It is only holding a Candle to the Sun; they are the Opinions of Men only, and can give neither Light nor Authority to the Law, which is given us by Christ from Heaven. To us Christians, *to us*, as St. * James says, *there is one Lawgiver*, who is *able to save, and to destroy*. Let us then look into His Law, into the Precepts and Directions He has given us in the Gospel; and from thence, by the fairest Reasonings and Deductions, will appear the horrid Sinfulness of Self-Murder.

It has been said, that in the Gospel, Suicide, or Self-Murder, is no where prohibited or condemned. This has been confidently urged by some Men, and, I think, too rashly and improperly allowed by others. We have but one Instance of Suicide in the New Testament, and that is of the Traytor *Judas Iscariot*: a Person, whose Fate, and whose Character, should give but little Encouragement to any Christian to imitate him: For it is most plainly and most strongly condemned in Scripture. He is called in the Gospel, by St. John †, (and I know
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* James iv. 12.

† John vi. 70.

not how he could be called by a worse Name) *a Devil*—and *the Son of Perdition**. And in the first Chapter of the *Acts of the Apostles*, at the 25th Verse, after the Account given of His violent Death, he is said to have gone, *εις τὸν τόπον τὸν ἰδίον*, to a Place proper and provided for him†. This is plain and clear; and is not the Inference as plain to all Christians, not to follow his Example, lest they also should follow him to the Place he is gone to?

AGAIN, will any one say, that that is not forbidden by the Gospel, which is so directly opposite to the Duties and Virtues so strongly enjoined and recommended in it. Patience under Sufferings, Meekness in Tribulation, Submission to the Will of God; not only an humble, but a thankful Acceptance of whatever shall come from Him; is every where taught us in the Gospel of Christ, and is certainly the proper Demeanour of such a Creature as Man is, to his Maker. Now, if we consider the general Causes and Occasions for which Men destroy themselves, we shall find that they act in direct Contradiction to the Precepts laid down to them in the Gospel. The Advocates for, and the Defenders of Self-Murder do not put the Case fairly, when they suppose a Man in the Extremity of Misery and Affliction, labouring under an incurable and unsupportable Distemper, and therefore throwing up Life, when it can be no longer a Blessing to him, or of any Use to Society. In fact, the Case is far otherwise with most of them, who are guilty of this Crime; and, in general, it may be said, that the Violence they commit on themselves, proceeds from one of these Causes or Motives—either a guilty Conscience—

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turbulent

* John xvii. 12.

† The best Commentators on these Words agree, that they signify the Place allotted for Men after this Life. Thus *Ignatius* says, *ἕκαστος εἰς τὸν ἰδίον τόπον μέλλει χωρεῖν*.

turbulent and unruly Passions—disappointed Pride and Ambition—or, lastly, to avoid that Want and Misery, which their Follies or their Vices have brought on them; and in all these Cases, surely, Self-Murder may from the Gospel be made to appear highly criminal and sinful.

As to the First, which perhaps is the most grievous Case, that of a guilty Conscience; let the Load of Guilt be ever so great, what says our Saviour in the Gospel? *Come unto me all ye that are weary, and heavy-laden, and I will give you Rest* *.

MERCY, unbounded Mercy is offered to every Sin, and to every Degree of Guilt, provided it be sincerely repented of: What then can be said for Men, who instead of accepting their Pardon, and performing the Conditions on which it is most graciously offered, despair of, and despise the Mercies of God; most presumptuously rush into the Presence of their Judge, and complete their Iniquity by an Act, which cannot be pardoned, because it cannot be repented of.

A Circumstance, duly to be weighed, and deeply to be considered; for, by the Terms of the Gospel Covenant, no Sin can be remitted, that is not repented of: if therefore, this last Action of a Man's Life should be sinful, what a Hazard must he run of his Salvation? I say it again, that if Suicide be sinful, whosoever shall thus part with his Soul, must lose it. The least Degree of Doubt ought, therefore, to deter every one from it. The Silence of Scripture, even if it had been absolutely silent on this Occasion, would not be sufficient to embolden a Man to such an Action. He should be *sure* and *certain*

* Mat. xi. 28.

certain that it was perfectly lawful and innocent, before he dared to commit it: And, I think it impossible so to pervert the Words of Scripture, as to find in them a Justification of Self-Murder.

OF this only can we be *sure* from Scripture, that it is the Duty of every Man to submit to the Will of God, and to abide by the Dispensations of Providence.

AGAIN, as to Violence and unruly Passions, are they not in themselves sinful? Are they not made so, by a Man's suffering them to get the Dominion over him? Which, when they have done, they will drive him on the most wicked and unwarrantable Actions; and though he is then hardly Master of himself, yet he is strictly answerable for all the Wickedness he can or shall commit. The Fault was originally and solely in himself.

UNRULY Passions are the great Sources of all the Evil in the World; and therefore we are strictly enjoined by the Law of God, to bridle and subdue them.

NEITHER can any Man say, that it is not in his Power to restrain them.—Be our Passions never so violent; let a Man but steadily and resolutely say to them, as our Saviour saith to the Waves of the Sea, * *Peace, be still*, and there will be a Calm.

BUT if, instead of this, Men will loosen the Reins, and give themselves up to the Guidance of their Passions, they must answer for all the Consequences of so intemperate and
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* Mark iv. 39.

irrational a Conduct; which, indeed, is in itself an absolute Opposition to the Laws both of God and Nature.

THUS it happens, that a Man is possessed with an inordinate Passion, perhaps, for a forbidden Object, without any Regard to the Checks of Conscience, or the Admonitions of Reason; he indulges himself in it, and suffers it to get the whole Possession of him; and that, even when there is no Possibility of gratifying it; from that Time it becomes a perpetual Torment, and renders Life so uneasy to him, that he cannot, and will not bear it; and, therefore, with his own Hand he destroys it.

IN what manner must such a Wretch appear before a God of Purity and Justice? What can he plead, whose whole Excuse is, that one Sin drove him on to the Commission of another*.

THUS again, another Man is carried away with Pride and Ambition; perhaps, his Views are blasted, and his wicked Intentions defeated; and then, like *Abfalom's* Counsellor, when his Advice was rejected, *He goes home, and hangs himself.*

BUT can any one think that *Achitophel's* hanging himself could atone for the Rebellion he engaged in, or that disappointed Treason could excuse the Violence he committed on himself?

AGAIN, another Person may have suffered Covetousness, and an unbounded Desire of Riches to have taken such Possession

* The noted Author of the *Oracles of Reason*, and the *Essay on Self-Murder*, is generally said to have entertained a Passion for his Wife's Sister, and when she refused to comply with his Desire, to have stabbed himself.

session of his Heart, that in the Midst of Abundance he may live in the daily Apprehension of Poverty; and the Fear of Want at last so far gets the better of the Fear of Death, that to avoid the one, he wilfully brings on the other.

WHAT can be said of such a one, but that he manifestly values his Soul much less than his Substance, and that his Destruction is owing to that, which God has declared to be the *Root of all Evil*?

BESIDES the imaginary Ills which Passion and Folly may bring on Mankind, there may be a great and real Degree of Misery, Affliction and Want, which Men may bring on themselves by their Folly, Extravagance, and Vices. But have they not brought it on themselves? *Why* then (as the * Prophet expresses it) *does a living Man complain, a Man for the Punishment of his Sins?*

WHEN Men have made their Lives miserable by Wickedness, they are too apt to shorten them by Violence.

BUT this argues not only an absolute Distrust of Providence, but a most presumptuous Rebellion against it.

MAY we not say to such Men, as the Prophet † *Micah* does to the Children of *Israel*, when their Wickedness and Idolatry had brought on them the Misery they deserved; *Hear ye now the Rod, and who hath appointed it?*

THAT Misery should follow upon Wickedness, is, in general, appointed by God, the wise and righteous Governor

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* Lam. iii. 39.

† Mic. vi. 9.

of the World ; and he who endeavours to escape it, by destroying himself, vainly endeavours to subvert the Order of Causes, and the Course of Nature : He will only add to his Guilt, and increase his Misery ; he will find, as our Saviour saith of his Self-murdering Disciple, it ** would have been better for him, that he had never been born.*

THERE may be, indeed, most grievous Afflictions, which may befall Men, not through their own Default ; but if they are true Christians, their Religion will support and sustain them under all of them. As to the *Magnanimity* of bearing up under Afflictions with Spirit and Fortitude, I leave that to be celebrated by Poets and Orators, who are apt enough to extol and magnify human Virtue beyond what it deserves.

THE less pompous, though more cogent Argument of Christianity on such Occasions, is—that we are all of us vile and sinful Creatures—that, let our Afflictions be never so great, they are less than we deserve ; we are, therefore, to submit to them, as the just Corrections of an all-merciful Father, by which he thinks proper to try our Faith, and our Patience ; which he will hereafter reward with everlasting Happiness.

How much more Satisfaction is there in this, than in all the Consolations of Philosophy, which are generally too airy and speculative, to give any Comfort under real Affliction ?

WE have hitherto considered the general Causes and Occasions of Self-Murder ; and we may see plainly, as Christians, how sinful it is, since it manifestly proceeds from some sinful
Passion,

* Matt. xxvi. 24.

Passion, such as the Gospel of Christ hath commanded us to mortify and subdue, and without which we can have no Hopes of entering into the Kingdom of Heaven.

THERE is still another general Argument, which proves the Sinfulness of Self-Murder, and that is, that Life is a State of Probation, in which God may lay on us what Trials He pleases; we are to submit to them as coming from Him.—We are not to forsake our Posts without his Permission, nor to quit our Station, until we are called from it by Him, to whom alone belong the Issues of Life and of Death. This hath been acknowledged by the wisest among the Heathens, and cannot be doubted of, or denied by Christians. This is a most weighty Consideration, and which ought to have been duly attended to by all Men of Piety and Religion. For, with Shame and Concern must we own, that some, even of them, have been most unaccountably seduced to this Crime.

THERE is a particular Set of Men lately risen up amongst us, to whose Piety and Morals I do not mean to object; neither do I know of any Tenet or Principle held among them, that encourages the Practice of Self-Murder; and yet the Commission of it has been too frequent and notorious among them. This seems to be owing to a Gloominess and Horror, which some Mistakes in Religion have brought on their Mind; viewing only the gloomy Side of Religion, they say to their own Hearts, as *Job* * most strongly expresses it of himself, *The Arrows of the Almighty are within me, the Poison whereof drinketh up my Spirit, the Terrors of God are set in Array against me*: Thus terrified and affrighted, the Use of their Reason is in a great Degree taken from them, and, for the Sake of present

Relief from their horrid Misery, they are driven into an Action, which they themselves have not Principles to justify. Otherwise, it is impossible to account how the Dread of Damnation should hasten Men into it, and make them willingly, and before their Time, rush into that Fire which they believe is prepar'd for them.

LET the Example, my Brethren, of these unhappy Men make you cautious how you follow after new Teachers, and new Doctrines; and be ye content to be saved, where verily, and by God's Grace, ye may be saved, in the Communion in which ye were bred and baptized.

AGAIN, there is another Argument to prove the Sinfulness of Self-Murder; and that is, that Actions are to be taken and considered, not only as they are in *themselves*, but in the *Consequences* which naturally follow and attend upon them.

THUS, when we are commanded not to murder any Man, it is not only on account of the Life of a particular Man, but of the Injury to Society; the Sorrow, Distress, and Anguish, which may thereby be brought on his Friends, Relations, and Family.

THE same may be said, much stronger, in relation to Self-Murder. Whatever Liberty and Power a Man may pretend to over himself, he has, surely, no Right to bring Disgrace and Sorrow on all with whom he is connected. Before a Man commits this last rash Action, he should think on the afflicted Friend, the mournful Widow, and the fatherless Family; the Tears, the Anguish, and Misery of all those who had a Right to his Love and Protection.

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BUT I shall no longer insist on this, since it cannot be well expected, that Men, who shew no Regard to themselves, and their own Souls, should shew much to the Peace and Happiness of their Friends, and Relations.

THERE is a Consideration of another Nature, which, if it were not for the wicked Corruption of the World, might have a stronger Effect on those who purpose to be their own Executioners, and that is, the Penalty the Law * subjects them to.

WERE this Law duly executed, were Men *sure* that they should forfeit their Possessions by throwing away their Lives, I believe this horrid Crime would be in a great Measure prevented. But, alas! the contrary is almost *sure*. Both Laws and Oaths are become *nothing* more, than vain and useless Words. Let a Man shew as much Thought and Contrivance in destroying his Life, as he could in preserving it; let him do it with never so much Calmness and Deliberation, yet there will not be wanting a set of Men, who, after a formal Mock-Enquiry, will declare him a Lunatic, upon their Oaths.

IT hath, indeed, been said, that when a Man destroys himself, he may be *presumed* to have lost his Senses. But then, of what Use is the Law? And what is it that the Jury is called together to enquire into? The Truth is, they are called together to keep up the Formality, and to set aside the Spirit and Intention of the Law; to receive, I am afraid, a stated Fee for a directed Verdict; in plain Words, to be bribed, and to be forsworn.

THIS, indeed, is to charge on them a high Degree of Wick- edness. But if it be true, it ought to be spoken, and if it

* I am well informed, that in *Scotland*, where the Penalties on Self-Murder are impartially executed, the Crime is very rarely committed.

be not so, I would only ask—How comes it to pass, that no Man of Rank and Fortune was ever subjected to the Penalties of this Law, whilst the poor miserable Wretches, who do not leave Substance enough to pay for a Verdict, hardly ever obtain one in their Favour. If in these Cases, any Degree of Compassion might be supposed to operate and prevail, even that is false and criminal. Men have nothing to do with Pity, when they are bound by Oath, to search into Truth, and to execute Justice. Such Compassion is Tenderneſs to the Dead, and Cruelty to the Living; who, if the Law was duly and impartially executed, and Examples of it viſibly ſet before them, might, perhaps, be more effectually deterred from the Crime, than by any thing that can be urged to them, either from Reason or Religion.

FOR too true it is, that Men have more Regard to their earthly perishable Bodies, than to their precious and immortal Souls; and they shew much more Concern for their worldly Possessions, than for the Inheritance they might expect hereafter.

AND yet if it be duly considered, nay, if it be considered but for a Moment, of what Use or Profit is it for Men to escape the Penalty of human Laws, when they are still liable to the Inspection of infinite Wisdom, and have rendered themselves obnoxious to the Vengeance of infinite Power,—*that Wisdom*, which nothing can elude,—*that Justice*, which nothing can escape?

THE perjured Juryman may exempt the Carcass from the Infamy, the Law would most justly inflict on it. The doubting Clergyman may, and must, after such a Verdict, obey the

the Law, and administer Christian Burial to the Wretch who has made a most unchristian End;—*in vain*, shamefully *in vain*, will it be said, (as in our Office) that God has taken to himself the Soul of our departed Brother, *that Soul*, which, without his Permission, has rushed, overwhelmed with Sin and Pollution, into his Presence—is trembling with Horror, and doomed to everlasting Punishment with the Devil; at whose * *Instigation*, this, as well as all other Sorts of Murder, is, by our Law, justly presumed to be committed.

THIS, I hope, may be sufficient to shew the heinous Sinfulness of Self-Murder; let me add a few Words to induce you to the Abhorrence of it.—I have laid before you the general Causes of it; if they can be removed, the dreadful Effect may be prevented. No Words, indeed, can be too much—no Declarations too strong against a Crime, which is not only common, but in a manner National among us.

IN the present Dispositions of your Mind, you may possibly think that you are incapable of committing this horrid Sin against God and yourselves; but take heed, and beware of the Steps that lead to it—watch over—guard against, and subdue those Passions, which produce this miserable End; which generally, though perhaps unexpectedly, bring about this sad Catastrophe.

LEARN then, from hence, to check that Extravagance, and Profusion, which must produce Want, and all the Miseries attending on it; such as makes Life itself a State of Misery, especially to those who have softened themselves in effeminate Luxury and Pleasure.—Mortify, and bring down that *Pride*,
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* By the Coroner's Law.

and *Ambition*, which can admit of *no* Check, and will bear *no* Disappointment:—Unreasonable Turn of human Nature! that can expect to live in this World, without Crosses, Vexation, and Disappointment. Again, root out that *Covetousness*, which knows no End of Life, but that of *heaping up Riches in vain*.

FINALLY, subdue *those fleshly Lusts, which war against the Soul*; which disturb and distract it with various and violent Attacks; and drive it at last from the Station, which it has not Strength enough to hold and maintain. And after all, if Misery and Affliction should be your Portion—Trust in, and submit to Providence, whose Power is infinite, and whose Mercy is never-failing:—Most humbly pray to God, to remove his Rod from you, or to give you Strength and Abilities to bear his Correction with Patience and Meekness; *knowing that it may work for you a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.* 2 Cor. iv. 17.

LASTLY, as to the miserable and most pitiable Case of those, who, through some Defects in their Constitution, or Mistakes in Religion, are driven into Despair of God's Mercy,—the most terrible State that a human Mind can labour under—Let them make use of all the Help that Medicine can give to the Body, where many Times the whole Distemper lies—And then, let them look upon God in the Character, under which he is every where represented in the New Testament, as the common Father of Mankind, *who so loved the World, that He gave his only begotten Son, to that very End, that all that believe in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.* Joh. iii. 16.—Let them often read and meditate upon those Passages in the Gospel, where the Mercies of God are most fully set forth,
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and declared:—Particularly that Passage of St. *John*, (1 Joh. i. 9.) where it is declared, that *if we confess*, i. e. repent of *our Sins*, *God is faithful and just to forgive us our Sins*: not only gracious and merciful; but *faithful* and *just*, to pardon our Sins.—Which Words imply and contain in them a Promise, and a Covenant of Mercy and Forgiveness, to all them who with *true Faith turn unto Him*:—A Promise, which cannot fail—a Covenant which cannot be broken; since God must be false to his Word, so often given, before He can reject those from Mercy, who, with humble Hearts and sincere Contrition, seek it from Him.

THERE are not certainly greater, or more real Objects of Compassion, than those who labour under a religious Melancholy; who believe, and who repent, without Hope or Consolation. The Anguish they suffer, is beyond any bodily Pain —The Terrors they undergo, are beyond any Thing that this World can inspire.

THESE are the Men to whom I would particularly address myself; and, therefore, if in the Midst of their Misery, they should at any Time be tempted to put an End to it by destroying themselves; if any such Thought should enter into their Minds,—let me beseech and conjure them, to discard it at once,—to look upon it, as it certainly is, as the Suggestion of *Satan*,—as the surest Snare that he can lay for their Souls,—the Means, not only of drawing *them* into Perdition, but of bringing Disgrace even upon Religion itself.

ALL they, who thus unhappily turn what might be their greatest *Comfort*, into their greatest Torment, not only demand

our sincerest Compassion, but they have a Right also to our most fervent Prayers for them.—That it may therefore please Thee to comfort and help the Weak-hearted ;—to raise up them that otherwise would fall ; and, finally, to beat down Satan under their Feet—*We beseech Thee to hear us, Good LORD.*



F I N I S .